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AUTHOR Beam, Randal A.
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ABSTRACT

Although professionalism has been an important concept to American journalists for over a century, no consensus exists regarding what concepts like profession, professionalism, and professionalization mean. Three basic traditions have dominated the sociological literature on professionalism: (1) the phenomenological approach, which advocates studying the way ordinary members of an occupation invoke the term in everyday usage; (2) the power approach, which addresses professionalization issues as a political process; and (3) open-system models of organization, which state that organizations are composed of loosely coupled parts, and that environmental factors play a prominent role in the functioning of an organization. Open-system models of organization and power models of professions can be joined to develop a new conceptual framework for professionalism. Under this new framework, professionalism is conceptualized at the organizational level rather than the individual level, as has been the case with most previous studies of professionalism in journalism. Occupational groups, in this model, vary in their degree of professionalization by the degree of control they secure over their work. For less powerful occupations, such as journalism, the degree of organizational professionalism reflects the extent to which workers are perceived by the organization's dominant coalition as essential to that organization's effective functioning. This organizational-level conceptualization of professionalism is useful when studying the actions of organizations and organizational output, as opposed to the attitudes and values of individual journalists. (Sixty references are appended.) (MM)

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Theory and Methodology Division

PROFESSIONALISM AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONCEPT

by

Randal A. Beam

School of Journalism
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
(503) 686-3747

ABSTRACT

Open-system models of organizations and power models of the professions are wed to develop a new conceptual framework for professionalism. Under the new framework, professionalism is conceptualized at the organizational-level rather than the individual level, as has been the case with most previous studies of professionalism in journalism.

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PROFESSIONALISM AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONCEPT

For more than a century, professionalism has been a concept important to American journalism. It is written about in trade journals, scholarly publications and journalism texts. It has become the focus of courtroom battles over overtime pay (Steptoe, 1987). It is raised, almost like the flag, to explain or defend many things journalists do.

Yet, there is a remarkable lack of consensus about what concepts like profession, professionalism and professionalization mean. In his social history of American journalism, Schudson (1978) suggests that professionalism constitutes an ideological commitment to objectivity and truth. The famous publisher Joseph Pulitzer (1904), one of the first to advocate the professionalization of journalism, equates that process with better education and training, so as to improve the status of journalists. Walter Lippmann, another early advocate of greater journalistic "professionalism," viewed the concept more as an approach to work in which the journalist adopts a disinterested stance toward phenomena being reported upon (Lippmann, 1920; Schudson, 1978:151-155). Mass media scholars, applying sociological models of professions, have debated whether journalism is a profession (Kimball, 1965; Singletary, 1982). They have examined the "professional orientation" of journalists and others who are part of the mass communication process (McLeod and Hawley, 1964; Nayman, 1970; Coldwell, 1970). And they have examined professional values or professional ideologies of journalists (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman,

1972-73; Phillips, 1977; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986).

This diversity of approaches to professionalism is mirrored in sociological literature on work and occupations. Some scholars promote a phenomenological perspective that generally eschews an a priori definition of profession or professionalism and instead looks at how the term is used in everyday life (Dingwall, 1976; Freidson, 1983). Others embrace definition and attempt it by exhaustively cataloging the traits or attributes shared by occupations commonly identified as professions (Becker, 1956; Lieberman, 1956). More recently, profession has been conceptualized in terms of occupational power relationships (Johnson, 1972 and 1973; Freidson, 1973). Under this approach, professions can be viewed as occupations in which members collectively have secured substantial control over the substance, performance and goals of their work, and professionalism can be thought of as collegial occupational self-control.

This paper is about professionalism in journalism. But it differs from much previous work in two important ways:

--It is lodged not in the phenomenological or attribute models of professions, but rather in the so-called power model. The emphasis is upon occupational control over the terms of journalistic work.

--It attempts to integrate the power model of professions with open-system models of organizations. In doing so, it recognizes the variable degree of control journalists have over terms of their work across media organizations, and it offers a re-conceptualization of professionalism as an organizational-level concept.

Defining professionalism as an organizational-level concept has both practical and theoretical advantages. It provides a useful way in which to view the professionalization of an occupation; it suggests

another strategy for understanding the forces that influence how information is created in news media organizations; and it takes the analysis of professionalism beyond the individual level of analysis, thereby providing a way to link the concept of professionalism with organizational performance. Those ideas will be discussed in more detail at the end of the paper.

Theories of Professions and Their Application to Journalism

Three basic traditions have dominated the sociological literature on professionalism, though other approaches can be found when the conceptual hair-splitting begins.

In some ways, the phenomenological approach is the least-formalized. It rejects a strict, formal definition of profession as artificial (Freidson, 1983). Rather, it advocates studying the way ordinary members of an occupation invoke the term in everyday usage (Dingwall, 1976, 1983). In arguing for the value of this approach, Dingwall says that any attempt to define the concept of profession a priori assumes the concept has fixed meaning. Since he argues that meaning changes across time, researchers ought to abandon attempts to legislate the meaning of profession. Instead, Dingwall says, researchers should see what, among other things, members of a given occupational group mean when they talk about professional or non-professional status, attitudes or behaviors. The strength of such an approach, Dingwall says, is that the researcher studies what really happens -- not an objectified, idealized description of a social phenomenon. Many analyses of professionalism in journalism are essentially phenomenological. For example, that's the case with

writings on objectivity as a "professional" work value (Tuchman, 1972; Janowitz, 1975; Phillips, 1977). Adherence to that value is believed to be linked to journalists' perceptions about their correct occupational roles. That is, commitment to objectivity is a yardstick journalists use in evaluating the professionalism of their colleagues. "Professional" also may be equated with being skilled, being fast, being unflappable.

One of the limitations of the phenomenological approach is that it makes cross-occupational comparison difficult because occupations are not being compared on a common standard. The search for such a standard, however, typifies the attribute or trait models of professions.[1] Researchers have tried to abstract a set of core characteristics that all professions share (Becker, 1956; Lieberman, 1956; Greenwood, 1957; Goode, 1960 and 1969; Hall, 1975). The number of core characteristics varies depending upon whom you read. But these are the most commonly mentioned attributes of a profession:

--The occupation must be organized around a systematic, theoretical body of knowledge or specialized technique. This knowledge is viewed as the basis of professional action, such as advice-giving or treatment.

--Members of the occupation have broad latitude in carrying out occupational duties or responsibilities. This is sometimes called professional autonomy or authority. Mostly, autonomy has been treated as lack of direct supervision or control over work tasks. Goode (1969) says that for professionals working in complex organizations, this definition is inappropriate. He suggests that the key determinant of autonomy is who controls another's work -- a peer or someone outside the occupational group.

--The occupation must emphasize service, as opposed to economic gain. This does not necessarily imply rejection of self-interest by the professional. In articulating the relationship between altruism and self-interest in the professions, Parsons (1939) acknowledges that there has been a tendency to think of the business person as being motivated by self-interest and the professional as being motivated by service to fellow humans. Parsons argues that there is little basis for assuming any broad difference in the typical motivation of the individual business person and the individual professional. On the other hand, he believes there is a clear difference between business and profession at an institutional level. Parsons says the institutional patterns governing the expected actions of business person and professional are radically different. Greenwood (1957) handles the distinction this way: Professionals are organized and controlled in such as way that they cannot avoid certain obligations, regardless of personal feelings.

--The occupation must develop a "professional" culture, which should include values, norms and symbols common to members of the profession (Greenwood, 1957). They may be transmitted through lengthy socialization (Hughes, 1965). The culture also may be manifested through self-governing professional associations (Lieberman, 1957).

--The products produced by professionals are unstandardized. In part, that is used to justify the need for individual autonomy.

--Professions tend to be life-long, terminal occupations. Presumably, this is because of the extensive educational and socializational processes a professional usually goes through.

The trait or attribute approach undergirds much of the work done by McLeod and his students during the 1960s and 1970s. Starting with

many of the core attributes, McLeod and Hawley (1964) developed and tested a "professional orientation" scale for journalists. The scale was sufficiently general that later it was applied to photographers, public relations practitioners and others involved in information production (Coldwell, 1970; Hallahan, 1974; Nayman, McKee and Lattimore, 1977). McLeod and Hawley looked at the relationship between professional orientation scores and certain attitudes or cognitive structures of individuals. Coldwell (1970) studied professional orientation and the performance of photographers. Graf (1971) and Lattimore (1972) explored the link between the average professional orientation scores of journalists at a media organization and the performance of that organization on a variety of variables. It is difficult to adequately summarize the findings of this diverse set of studies except to say that professional orientation (as measured by the McLeod-Hawley scale) does seem to be associated with distinctive cognitive structures, attitudes and behaviors.

The McLeod-Hawley scale has been criticized for being methodologically inadequate (Ferguson, 1981) and theoretically unsatisfactory (Windahl and Rosengren, 1978). The major complaint of Windahl and Rosengren (1978) is that the McLeod-Hawley scale assumes professional orientation is is incompatible with the search for other rewards. Perhaps more importantly, the entire attribute framework from which the McLeod-Hawley scale evolved has been critiqued. It has been criticized for being imprecise and inconsistent; for confusing individual and social processes; for downplaying the political or economic aspects of the professionalization process (Johnson, 1972; Roth, 1974; Forsyth and Danisiewicz, 1985).

An emphasis on political processes is at the heart of the power

approach to the study of professions. This model addresses such issues as professionalization as a political process, the relationship of professionals to other important actors in their environment, and the relationship of the professions to the labor markets (Johnson 1972 and 1973; Sarfatti-Larson, 1977).

Johnson (1972 and 1973) locates the concept of profession in the nature of consumer-producer relations. Broadly stated, he argues that there is uncertainty or tension in any consumer-producer relationship, and that three basic methods have evolved for reducing that tension. One is client or consumer control, in which the consumer defines his own needs and the manner in which they are to be met. A second is third-party control, in which some outside agent mediates in the relationship between consumer and producer, defining both the consumer needs and manner in which the needs are met. The third is collegiate control, in which the producer defines the needs of the consumer and the manner in which those needs are catered met, presumably acting in the consumer's best interests.

Professionalism is a sub-type of collegiate control, in Johnson's view (1972 and 1973). It "arises where tensions inherent in the producer-consumer relationship are controlled by means of an institutional framework based upon occupational authority" (Johnson, 1972:31). Collegiate control is exemplified by the emergence of autonomous occupational associations, which bestow status and identity on practitioners, attempt to sustain interest among members, and promote uniform policies by imposing a monopoly on practice in the field and regulating entry to it. The association also develops sanction mechanisms for controlling both occupational and non-occupational behavior (Johnson, 1972:54).

One of the key implications of Johnson's conceptualization of profession -- one strikingly different from the conceptualization of the trait models -- is that the professionalization process is historically specific. He writes, "A profession is not, then, an occupation, but a means of controlling an occupation. Likewise, professionalisation is a historically specific process which some occupations have undergone at a particular time, rather than a process which certain occupations may always be expected to undergo because of their 'essential' qualities" (Johnson, 1972:45). So, over time, an occupation may become more or less professionalized.

As with Johnson, Freidson locates the notion of profession in the control an occupational group exerts over its work. Freidson says there are basically two principles for organizing work -- the administrative principle and the occupational principle. Under the administrative principle, the legitimate authority for the organization of work rests in the office of an administrator or manager. By comparison, the occupational principle locates the authority to control work among the workers, collectively. The legitimate basis for such control, he says, is the imputed expertise of the workers. In Freidson's view, professions are structured according to the organizational principle. The central, strategic task of organizing work is forumulated, controlled and evaluted by workers.

What does the occupational principle imply about hierarchical structuring of work environments? Freidson says professionalization implies that management must give up much of its prerogative to control and coordinate the functioning of work. The occupational principle is not, however, incompatible with hierarchical structuring

of work tasks. But the hierarchical structure is erected within the profession, presumably based upon expertise rather than administrative authority. An administrative structure may exist, Friedson says, but it is supportive rather than authoritative. It is stripped of the right to exercise imperative coordination of work.

Both Freidson and Johnson seem to view professionalization as largely a political process, during which many of the traits or attributes commonly associated with a profession evolved. That view provides a link of sorts to the attribute or trait models of profession, and may in fact account for some of the common characteristics that professionalized occupations share. But what underlies these common characteristics is occupational authority -- the prerogative of an occupational group to control the terms of its work. That prerogative to control is achieved through poltical processes. In these processes, organizations representing all or substantial segments of the occupation organize and secure the authority to act in behalf of the occupational group. Typically, that authority is a function of sucessful efforts by the occupational group's representative organizations to establish control over the occupation's base of knowledge and techniques. Imputed expertise, then, is used politically to secure prerogative.

Relatively few attempts have been made to apply this approach to the professions to journalism. Soloski (1984) draws off this literature in suggesting that professionalism is a means of social control. But his emphasis is upon an occupational commitment to "objectivity" as an efficient mechanism of control that is generally embraced by the owners of mass media organizations. Soloski argues that, much to the owners' pleasure, objectivity results in the kind of

news coverage that neither threatens the economic position of individual news organizations nor the economic system in which such organizations operate.

Of the three approaches to profession described above, it is the last that serves as foundation for the re-conceptualization of professionalism I'll suggest. The emphasis on power relations provides an important bridge to open-system models of organizations, which figure prominently in my attempt to develop professionalism as an organizational-level concept.

Open-System Models of Organizations

An open-system model of organizations emphasizes two notions that are fundamental here (March and Olsen, 1976; Scott, 1981:109-111):

--Organizations are composed of loosely coupled subsystems or parts.

--Environmental factors play a prominent role in the functioning of an organization, strongly influencing the course or operation of the system.

Thus, the open-system model conceives of organizations as a collective of shifting interest groups, loosely coupled, that develops goals or actions by negotiation. The structure of this coalition of groups, its activities and its outcomes are strongly influenced by environmental factors (Scott, 1981:23). One of the dilemmas posed by open-system models is determining organizational boundaries. Because of their openness, determining boundaries is difficult and can be arbitrary (Scott, 1981:109). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) deal with this issues by emphasizing the activities and behaviors encompassed by

an organization, not which specific individuals are included in the organization.

Open-system models embrace several more specific approaches to the study of organizations. Pfeffer (1981) has developed a political approach that envisions organizations as pluralistic collectives in which conflict among individuals or subgroups is normal. Organizational structure -- the institutionalized patterns of action for the organization -- results from bargaining among these individuals or groups. A key assumption is that when conflict over organizational goals exists, the relative power of the social actors involved in that conflict will determine how the conflict is resolved.

Control in Organizations

Just as the issue of control is central to the power models of professions, so is it central to various approaches to the study of organizations. Indeed, most all models of organizations assume that the social control of workers is a crucial matter. Control often is defined in terms of the strategies used to channel actions of social actors in specific directions. In an organizational context, Hage, Aiken and Marrett (1971:371) define control as the adequacy of achieving conformity with expectations of behavior and standards of work performance. Tannenbaum suggests control is a process in which a person, group or organization intentionally affects the behavior of other persons, groups or organizations (1968:5). Other definitions emphasize the interdependence of social actors. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) consider control to be the outcome of a relationship in which

the resources needed by one social actor are mediated by another social actor.

Professions, Organizations and Control of Work

Control over professional work done in organizational settings is of concern to professionalized occupational groups and the organizations that employ their members. Initially, "organization" and "profession" were thought to be incompatible; the hierarchical bureaucracy was seen as conflicting with the supposed autonomy of the professional. But as professionals increasingly tended to nest permanently in formal organizations, the emphasis shifted to an examination of ways in which professionals and organizations co-existed (for example, Blau and Scott, 1962; Kornhauser, 1963; Etzioni, 1961:51-67 and 1964:86-89; Hall, 1968; Montagna, 1968; Benson, 1973; Freidson, 1975:8, 95-96 and 1984; Satow, 1975; Child and Fulk, 1982; Davies, 1983). Often, the goals and values of the profession and the goals and values of an organization are assumed to conflict, and therefore produce tension that had to be accommodated through various mechanisms (Kornhauser, 1963; Soloski, 1984). This view is one of interdependent institutions at odds, institutions that limit each other (Kornhauser, 1963:9). But that is not always the case. Blau and Scott (1962) propose two basic kinds of organizations in which professionals work. The first is the "autonomous" professional organization, in which professionals within the organization retain considerable responsibility for defining organizational goals, for implementing those goals and for setting performance standards for

members of the organization. The second is the "heteronomous" organization, in which professional workers within the organization tend to be subordinated to an administrative structure controlled by those outside the profession. Hall expanded upon the Blau-Scott typology by adding two more categories:

--Private practice or self-employment organizations.

--Professional departments of larger organizations. These departments either could be subordinated within the organization or relatively autonomous.

The Blau-Scott-Hall typology is useful in categorizing organizations but does not really specify the relationship between profession and organization, or how an organization became autonomous or heteronomous. Also, there is an implication that this relationship is determined solely at the organizational level; that is, that the organized profession is more or less a "bit player" in this drama. Said another way, the organization unilaterally decides whether professionals will be in control, unaffected by forces outside its formal boundaries.

Implicitly, Satow (1975) envisions a potentially different relationship between organization and profession. She suggests some organizations are founded upon what she calls value-rational authority, which is authority grounded in the absolute value of a rationalized set of norms. According to Satow, an organization structured on value-rational authority embodies a commitment to certain goals, regardless of the consequence those goals may hold for the organization. In the extreme, such a commitment even could threaten the organization. Satow suggests that many organizations in which professionals work, or sectors of those organizations, can be

described as value-rational in orientation. Typically, professionals in such settings adhere to conventions and norms articulated by the occupational group. During situations of conflict with bureaucratic rules, the professional norms generally take precedence. Where the Blau-Scott-Hall typology of organizations gives precedence to organizational considerations in the structuring of work, Satow acknowledges that the profession also can play an important role in that process. Essentially, she implies that an organized profession may be the social actor that controls certain kinds of work done within an organization.

Toward a Conceptual Framework

It is possible, then, to discuss the concept of professionalism as both an organizational-level and occupational-level phenomenon.

First, one can think of occupational groups as varying in the general degree of control they have secured over the terms of their work -- they vary in their degree of professionalization. By control over terms of their work, I mean the prerogative of an occupational to create and direct the substance, performance and goals of its work. This would include the prerogative to determine such things as:

--What products or services the occupational group will have the exclusive right to provide or supply.

--Who will be qualified to provide or supply those products or services.

--How training will be conducted for those approved to provide or supply products or services.

--What conditions will apply to the production or distribution of

those products or services, including expectations about appropriate behavior and performance standards for those who produce or distribute those products or services.

Variance in this degree of control can exist across occupational groups at one point in time; within a single occupational group across time; or across occupational groups across time. Presumably no occupational group has complete and absolute control over the terms of its work. (Even physicians, who as an occupational group have substantial occupational authority, must submit to review by the legal system over allegations of malpractice.) So, it is perhaps more helpful to think of occupations as more or less professionalized, rather than to think of some occupations as professions and others as not. Medicine would be a more professionalized occupation than journalism; journalism would more professionalized than stenography, etc.

The degree of professionalization for an occupational group has a strong effect on which social actors will, in fact, control the terms of work done within a specific organizational settings. The more professionalized the occupational group, the greater the degree of control the occupational group has relative to other social actors operating within a specific organizational setting. For highly professionalized occupations, the occupational group itself becomes the primary agent of social control across organizational settings. It has authority over the terms of work for its members in an organizational setting. The structure of the organization -- by structure I mean its patterned or regularized actions -- is shaped to accommodate the terms for work generally established by the occupational group.

There would be variation, of course, in the degree of such control at the organizational level. But this variation would be minimal, reflecting the "strength" of the occupational group relative to others who might wish to influence the terms of work performed. For example, there would be relatively little variation in the degree to which physicians control the terms of their work at hospitals. Generally speaking, the physicians -- rather than hospital owners, patients, suppliers, or others -- are largely responsible for creating and directing the substance, performance and goals of their work across organizational settings. Their work is collegially controlled, and therefore those organizations are generally high in their degree of professionalism (as pertains to doctors).

Compared with medicine, journalism is a less-professionalized occupation. Generally, journalists have been less successful than physicians at securing authority to create and direct the substance, performance and goals of their work, and this is reflected in the structure of the occupational group. Training programs in journalism have been established, but they need not be accredited or approved by the occupational group; occupational associations exist to promote common interests and articulate standards of performance, but they lack formal sanction power for wayward members; no specific, legally protected occupational turf has been carved out; occupational custom mandates adopting a universalistic approach to dealing with political, economic and social phenomena, but other social actors (advertisers, business leaders, etc.) routinely interfere with editorial decision-making. Because journalism as an occupation generally is only semi-professionalized,[2] one should expect more variation across organizations in the degree to which the occupational group acts as

the agent of social control. That is, journalistic organizations should differ relatively widely in their degree of organizational professionalism. By this I mean they should vary relatively widely in the degree to which the occupational group collectively controls (is the agent of social control for) the work-related behaviors of its members within an organizational setting. This occupational control is distinct from control exercised by other important social actors, principally clients (in the case of journalism, the readers) and third parties (in the case of journalism, a large group of others, such as advertisers, sources, government regulators or production personnel).

An open-system model of organizations nicely accommodates this relationship between organization and profession because of the key role that environmental influences may play in shaping the structure of the organization and because of the model's view of an organization as composed of coalitions that negotiate to determine organizational structure. A professionalized or semi-professionalized occupational group would be one such environmental influence. Members of that occupational group working at a particular organization would comprise an influential coalition -- likely the dominant coalition -- within the organization. The occupational group would be essential to the successful functioning of the organization. Its members would tend to dominate the organization, and organizational structure would accommodate occupational control over terms of work.

For less-powerful occupations, such as journalism, the "hand" dealt to the occupational group vis a vis other social actors typically is weaker. In this case, the degree of organizational professionalism would tend to reflect the extent to which the journalists are <u>perceived</u> by the organization's dominant coalition as

essential to that organization's effective functioning. (Here I am not talking about "journalists" simply as the people in an organization who perform writing and editing tasks; I am talking about journalists as members of a specific occupational group that can be characterized as embracing certain expectations of behavior and standards of work performance. These expecations and standards have been articulated by the occupational group.) If journalists dominate the most powerful coalitions of an organization, occupational control over the terms of their work is more likely than if those outside the occupational group dominate the organization. Organizational professionalism would be quite variable across news media organizations because the occupational group -- journalism -- is not sufficiently powerful to have secured wide control over terms of its members work.

Applying the Conceptual Framework

This organizational-level conceptualization of professionalism is useful in several ways:

--The organization can be a window through which to examine the degree of professionalization of an occupational group. One way to compare occupations in terms of their professionalization is to look at the degree of professionalism for organizations in which members of the occupations work. Again, the expectation would be to find wider variation across organizations as the occupation becomes less professionalized. So, organizational professionalism can be a conceptual tool for comparing occupations.

--Conceptualizing professionalism at an organizational level is more theoretically satisfactory when one wants to study actions of organizations. As indicated above, the largest body of research on professionalism in journalism has emerged from the study of the attitudes and values of individual journalists -- their "professional orientation" (for example, McLeod and Hawley, 1964; McLeod and Rush, 1969a and 1969b; Nayman, 1970 and 1973; Hallahan, 1974; Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1972-73; Nayman, McKee and Lattimore, 1977; Windahl and Rosengren, 1978; Becker et al., 1984; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986). Presumably this attention to the professional orientation of journalists matters because it affects attitudes and behavior. Some research attempts to make that linkage. McLeod and Hawley (1964) found professional orientation linked to distinctive cognitive states. Coldwell (1970) examined the linkage between professional orientation and the performance of photographers. Others, however, were more interested in how the professionalism of staffs at media organizations affected such factors as content accuracy, aggressiveness of coverage, content diversity, comprehensiveness and fairness (Graf, 1971; Lattimore, 1972). The approach in this research assumed that the professional orientation of an organization was reflected in the aggregated, averaged professional orientation scores of staff members. That approach is conceptually and methodologically flawed. It fails to take into account environmental influences on organizational structure. Further, it assumes all formal members of an organization equally affect organizational outcomes; that everyone in the organization is equally important. Largely, that's not true for complex organizations. So, when one wants to examine content produced by an organization, which is an organizational outcome, it

seems more sensible to conceptualize professionalism at an organizational level rather than an individual level. In this role, the degree of organizational professionalism functions as an independent variable, potentially influencing content or other organizational outcomes. Graf (1971) notes that in some instances, the professional milieu of the newspapers he studied seem to be more important in predicting good performance than the professional orientation of editors or newsmen and newswomen.

--Organizational professionalism can function as a dependent measure for researchers interested in learning more about how environment affects organizational structure. Certain social, political, cultural or economic conditions may be more likely to give rise to organizations high in professionalism. For example, differences in ownership or community characteristics may yield differences in levels of organizational professionalism.

--This conceptualization may help explain what has appeared to be an inconsistency found in other studies of professionalism -- that individual autonomy, long considered a hallmark of a professional, was negatively related to media performance (Graf, 1971). Individual autonomy may be less important than whether the occupational group is the primary agent of social control in the newsroom.

--Organizational professionalism also offers a possible explanation for seemingly economically irrational actions by news media organizations, such as actions to improve performance absent clear economic incentives (e.g., competition) to do so.

Conceptualizing organizations as professional actors seems to offer opportunites for investigating the structure and performance of news media organizations, both theoretically and practically.

Footnotes

1 Functionalist models are similar in many respects to attribute models of professions, though are more explanatory in intent. Traits or attributes of professions are viewed largely as arising because of some functional need. Similarly, so-called natural-history models of professions postulate that occupations proceed sequentially through certain steps or phases that roughly resemble the traits or attributes commonly ascribed to professions (Wilensky, 1964).

2 This is a term of convenience to refer to occupations that have established some, but not substantial, control over the terms of their work (Goode, 1969.)

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